

Dear members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Jose Salas and I live in Windham. I am on the Steering Committee of a non-profit organization called The Neighbor Fund, which supports the immigrant communities of Windham and Tolland counties. I stand in support of HB 6616: "An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status". Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving, and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals up to age of 26 have access to health coverage.

I regularly come across undocumented people in my community who do not have adequate access to healthcare due to lack of health insurance. Whether it is through the context of my time volunteering with the Neighbor Fund, or as a healthcare worker serving people in my community, or simply as a member of my family and community, I am a witness to the impact this injustice has on peoples' lives. For this hearing, I will focus on how as a volunteer with the Neighbor Fund we have come across undocumented people facing this reality, which has only worsened during the pandemic.

An undocumented worker's social worker reached out to us looking for financial resources available for her client. She relayed the profound hardship this gentleman was facing due to temporarily being out of work because of undergoing a surgery. We were able to provide him assistance and a network with other local non-profits that could help him too. Even though this information was given to his social worker, he had authorized her to have me contact him. I had the opportunity to deliver the assistance we had gathered for him. When doing so, he expressed his deep gratitude towards the non-profits that could help him and lamented being in the situation he was in. He kept on repeating his concern, not knowing how he was going to pay down his medical bills and continue to sustain himself. He had been working hard, paying his taxes, and helping those close to him, but now he was in a bind. My mind kept on soaking in his situation and how, even though he was paying taxes and had been working very hard, he was ineligible for different types of support offered by our state. As a result of steep expenses associated with receiving adequate healthcare, he had put off his health. Instead, he resorted to home remedies to treat his ailment. In this reality he is not alone. We have seen children, parents and guardians all face this injustice due to being undocumented.

After observing this trend, I can only think that this is a systemic problem that our state must continue to address. We have seen examples of governments that keep our neighbors at the margins rather than changing underlying policies that impact their life circumstances. Their lives are politicized to dehumanize them, and this only serves to justify keeping in place broken systems whose negative effects reverberate in our communities'. Maintaining the status quo only serves to untangle the interwoven social fabric of our communities, and this impacts all of us. As we have been reminded time and time again during this pandemic, our "individual" well-being is interconnected. While our state took an important step to expand Husky program to pregnant individuals and children up to the age of 12, it must do more. Supporting and passing H.B. 6616 is a continued step in the right direction for this committee to take. Although, I must acknowledge that more must be done to provide this adequate access to our immigrant community members regardless of their age.

Thank you for your time,
Jose Salas
Member on the Neighbor Fund's Steering Committee